

THEOLOGY ARTICULATED THROUGH SUFFERING: HOW DOES THE
THEOLOGICAL EXPRESSION IN THE ANTE-NICENE PERIOD INFORM
THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH IN ALGERIA?

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Biblical texts are from the English Standard Version unless noted

“I need tears more than words to express the anguish

by means of which I can be able to mourn the blow to our

body,

by means of which I can express my grief

for the loss of a numerous people (St. Cyprian AD 251).”¹

I. Introduction

As a disciple participates in the work of Christ, he will also share in His suffering.² Just as Christ lived and ministered in passion, so He calls his followers to do the same.³ A disciple finds treasure through the refining fire.⁴ In their passion, followers of Christ leave the safety of life and lift up the name of Christ.⁵ Through this obedience, the Kingdom of God is extended. Suffering becomes a vehicle for the gospel to be understood. Through suffering the disciple articulates theology.

¹ Cyprian of Carthage, *On the church: select treatises Vol.32* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's seminary press, 2006), 104.

² *“I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death (Phil. 3.8-10).”*

³ *“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God (2 Tim. 1.8).*

⁴ *“though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire (1 Pet. 1.6-7).”*

⁵ *“when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself (Jn. 12.32).”*

The Ante-Nicene church of North Africa existed in a ruthless age. Their teaching demonstrated how the church should engage and respond to hostile societies. Their theology revealed the incarnate Christ working through His body, the church.⁶ Persecution in those days caused the average citizen to think twice about joining the church. Every follower of Christ knew they might need to testify to their faith at the cost of their own life.

This paper will briefly explore a brief history of Carthage and its deities. Then show how the Roman rule enforced pax Romana by assimilating the deities. In this setting, the church emerged and challenged paganism. The main body of the paper will examine the theology shaped by suffering in the Ante-Nicene church. Then the paper will consider the theology of suffering from the contemporary Kabyle church in Algeria. How can the ancient church inform the contemporary believers in North Africa on the issue of suffering?

II. Context for the Ante-Nicene Church in North Africa

The North African church grew in multiple people groups during and through several languages. The land was ruled by Rome, and with the Empire came Latin. However, Latin was not the heart language of the people. During the second century, Greek was used more regularly by the Romans, and Latin was reserved for officiating.⁷ In addition to Greek and

⁶ “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Col. 1.24).”

⁷ Dr. Don Fairbairn, “Early Latin North African Christianity” (lecture, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, MA, June 4th, 2018).

Latin, there were local languages, including Tamazight, Phoenician, and Hebrew. Hebrew came through the resettlement of Jews by Nebuchadnezzar to places such as Djerba (modern-day Tunisia).

It is unclear how the church began in North Africa; however, the church began to suffer and experience martyrdom under Roman persecution. It would be Tertullian who would first respond. Fifty years later, Cyprian became the influential voice before yielding to martyrdom. This narrative is the backdrop for the arrival of Augustine (AD 354-430) and the solidification of what became Western Christianity.

i. The origin and export of the Phoenician religion. Today in the Near East, there remain several ancient Baal temple ruins; the most significant is Baalbek in Lebanon.⁸ The archaeological site of Eschmoun survives outside the modern city of Sidon. The temple still projects the intimidation felt by the prophet Elijah who lived a few miles south in modern-day Sarafand (Zerapeth). Eschmoun was one of multiple Baal deities. “Baudissin thinks that he (Eschmoun) was a nature deity, and Barton considers him the counterpart of the Babylonian Duzza or Tammuz.”⁹ While Eschmoun was the focal deity, he was overshadowed by the mother deity Astarte. Eiselen suggests that her character could be understood through the Old Testament

⁸ “Baalbek,” [www.whc.unesco.org](https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/294/), accessed May 1, 2021, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/294/>.

⁹ Frederick Carl Eiselen, *Sidon: A Study in Oriental History*, Columbia University Oriental Studies (New York: AMS Press INC., 1966), 4:126.

descriptions.¹⁰ Ethbaal (Ithobal), King of the Sidonians, was the father of Jezebel, who was married to King Ahab (935 - 852 BC).¹¹

ii. Carthage, a Phoenician settlement. The Phoenicians were great merchants, famous for ruling the seas and colonizing lands. The Biblical Phoenicians, famous for building with cedar, “lashed together the boats that would connect Asia with Europe.”¹² By the 6th century BC, Carthage ruled the North African coast, Southern Spain, Sardinia, and most of Sicily. The Phoenicians brought culture, religion, shipbuilding and became a world power, competing with Greece and Rome.

Tradition teaches that Dido founded Carthage.¹³ Her name originated from the Hebrew names of David and Jedidiah, meaning “beloved.” She was worshipped as a goddess as long as Carthage stood.¹⁴ Virgil called her Elissa, which is the feminine name for God (*El*).’ Her family was possibly the direct descendant of King Eth-baal and Jezebel. Elissa, sister to Pygmalion, King of Tyre (reigned from 831 BC to 785 BC) married her very wealthy uncle Acerbas (or Sychæus). However, Pygmalion, jealous of his wealth, killed Acerbas. Elissa discovered the King had killed her husband in a dream, so she fled Tyre by ship with her wealth. Landing near Libya, she

¹⁰ Eiselen, *Sidon: A Study in Oriental History*, 4:127.

¹¹ “He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal King of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him (1 Kings. 16.31-32).”

¹² R. Bosworth Smith, *Carthage and the Carthaginians* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1908), 5.

¹³ Julius Lloyd, *The North African church* (London: The Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, 1880), 7.

¹⁴ Smith, *Carthage and the Carthaginians*, 13.

purchased a small piece of land from the friendly inhabitants.¹⁵ The fertile land strip along the coast made a perfect location. So, Elissa (Dido) founded a city called Kirjath-Hadeskath (New City) which, became known as Carthage.¹⁶ A temple of Baal stood on the hill, overlooking the city.

iii. The indigenous peoples: The Amaziah (the Berbers) were a patchwork of tribes and indigenous inhabitants since the Stone Age. "The name Imazighen itself appears to be derived from a root meaning *free man* or *masters*."¹⁷ They can be traced back to the Amorites of the Old Testament.¹⁸ They spoke variations of the Tamazight language. The dispersed tribes were never able to become a nation and endured one invasion after another. "It is the genius of the Imazighen that they seem able to absorb, to change and to *Berberize* any invader who places himself in the seat of power."¹⁹ Today the Amaziah people are located from Morocco to Libya and throughout the Atlas Mountains.

III. How Paganism Shaped the Political View of the Roman Empire.

i. Roman rule over North Africa. The power of Carthage inevitably clashed with the Roman Empire. After three Punic Wars Carthage was in ruin, subdued, and under Roman rule (264-146 BC). The Empire brought peace through suppression. Virgil explained Roman attitude after conquest was

¹⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁶ Lloyd, *The North African Church*, 7.

¹⁷ Robin Daniel, *This Holy Seed: Faith, Hope and Love in the Early Churches of North Africa*, 2nd ed. (Chester: Tamarisk Publications, 2009), 210.

¹⁸ C. R. Marsh, *Too Hard for God* (Bath: Echoes of Service, 1970), 6.

¹⁹ Ibid., 212.

“to hold dominion and seal peace with custom: Spare those who yield, the defiant utterly subdue.”²⁰ Virgil taught that the Empire was to impose the Pax Romana on its subjugated people, which was both the right and responsibility of conquest.

Romans named the coastline Africa – and colonized what is now Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. The name “Africa” may have derived from Aphrodisium (modern-day Mahdia), a coastal city two hundred kilometers south of Carthage. Forty kilometers inland led to Thysdrus (modern-day El Djem), North Africa’s second-largest Roman city. Today, El Djem is home to the most complete (30,000 seats) amphitheater in Africa.²¹ A sign in the arena states, “The spectacle consisted of fights between gladiators, ... and capital executions (Christian prisoners).” Beneath the forum, the *hypogeum* led to cells, illuminated by the daylight from the arena.²² A manual lift would have elevated contestants into the ring before cheering crowds. Cyprian described the Colosseum as “a death procession packed with people ... laid on so that the bloodshed might entertain ... Bodies are filled with strong food for energy...Thus fattened up for punishment. A man is slain for human sport.”²³

ii. The role of religion in Roman society. Roman religion was not concerned with the character of the worshipper, instead about strength and

²⁰ Livy, *Rome and the Mediterranean: Books xxxi-xlv of The History of Rome from its Foundation.*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 8.

²¹ “Amphitheater of El Jem,” whc.unesco.org, accessed June 29, 2018, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/38>.

²² See Appendix, photo 2 & 3. Gary Witherall. “*The hypogeum at El Djem in Tunisia.*” 2019. JPEG file.

²³ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol.32, 55

dominance.²⁴ “For a good Roman, one’s attitude toward the gods was inseparable to one’s attitude to the rest of life.” The consequence was that the gods shaped the culture. Cicero said: “Gods are necessary to prevent chaos in society.”²⁵ Peace with the gods (*pax deorum*) was maintained through precise rituals and dignified language (*certa verba*). The organized religion did not allow for additional deities. “No one shall privately have new or foreign gods unless publicly recognized.”²⁶

iii. Roman assimilation of African deities. Under Roman rule, the African deities received Latin names (*interpretatio Romana*).²⁷ The result unified the Roman world. Arguably the most important was the cult of Saturn (Punic Baal). He was known as the High God of Africa and Supreme Father.²⁸ Saturn was closely associated with agricultural fertility and the underworld. There were at least eighteen temples to Saturn in the region and the name of one district in Carthage.²⁹ However, Saturn was eclipsed by the terrifying female deity Caelestis, the patron saint of Carthage. Caelestis was Africanized from Greco-Roman gods, creating pride in the city. Eschmoun became known as Aesculapius. Tertullian condemned the sacrificial worship of Æsculapius in his writings, describing him as a demon.³⁰

²⁴ Michael Joseph Brown, *The Lord's Prayer through North African Eyes: A Window Into Early Christianity* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 56-7.

²⁵ Brown, *The Lord's Prayer through North African Eyes*, 53.

²⁶ Ibid., 188.

²⁷ Ibid., 189.

²⁸ Ibid., 190.

²⁹ Brown, *The Lord's Prayer through North African Eyes*, 191.

³⁰ Ibid., 191.

IV. Theological Expression of Suffering in the Ante-Nicene Martyrs

i. Roman disputes against the church. The church expansion in the first few centuries was explosive, moving from 1.4 million in AD 100 to 4.7 million in AD 200, and 14.3 million by AD 300.³¹ Roman rulers believed Christians engaged in such crimes as infanticide, cannibalism, and incest. Yet, the main concern was Christian refusal to offer sacrifices to the gods. As a result, Rome wanted Christianity eliminated. In a letter to emperor Trajan, Pliny asserted: "I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it, I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment. If they persist, I sentence them to death."³² Administrators such as Pliny were trying to do their legislative jobs. They were not always trying to kill Christians, but to enforce the Roman system. In AD 201 the Amaziah Emperor, Septimus Severus, issued an edict forbidding citizens from converting to Judaism or Christianity.³³ It was Hilarianus, the governor of the African Proconsul, who enforced the edict. In AD 203, he began to look for victims such as 'Perpetua' to be sent to the arena to celebrate the birthday of the Emperor's son Geta.³⁴

ii. The Scillitan Martyrs. The first persecution against the church took place under the rule of Marcus Aurelius (AD 121-180). Seven men and five

³¹ Patrick Johnstone, *the Future of the Global Church: History, Trends and Possibilities* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2011), 25-27.

³² Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 72.

³³ "A man who was himself an Amazigh – the emperor Septimius Severus, the first African to wear the imperial purple. Severus was a native of Leptis Magna near modern Tripoli in Libya, and this strange man ruled in Rome for eighteen years from AD 193 until he died in AD 211: Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 64."

³⁴ Brown, *The Lord's Prayer through North African Eyes*, 199.

women, Amaziah Christians from Scillium (modern-day Kasserine, Tunisia), were called to the administrator's office in Carthage.³⁵ The Roman authorities demanded they swear elegance to the emperor and offer sacrifices to him. The concept of an unseen Supreme God sharply contrasted with pagan idolatry.³⁶

During the interrogations, Speratus, one of the accused, explained the Christian position. They would pray for governmental leaders; however, the church did not recognize Rome as the supreme power.³⁷ He stated: "I do not acknowledge the authority of this world, but I rather serve that God whom no one has seen." He explained that while Christians will pay their tax, they worship God who is greater than Rome.³⁸ Then Speratus asked to present the mystery of the gospel, but the prosecutor would not listen.³⁹ As the official continued the interrogation, one by one the martyrs confessed, "I am a Christian." This must have appeared as foolishness to the Roman leader as he condemned the twelve to execution. However, the story revealed both men and women standing up for their faith. More importantly, the believers

³⁵ www.livius.org, s.v. "The Passion of the Scillitan Martyrs," <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/acts-of-the-scillitan-martyrs/translation/>.

³⁶ "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever (1 Tim. 1.17)." "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1.15)."

³⁷ "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (Rom. 13.1)."

³⁸ "We must obey God rather than men (Ac. 5.29)."

³⁹ "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ (Eph. 1.9-10)."

were known by the name of Christ. Speratus was confident: better to die for Christ than to live with pagan deities.

iii. Thirty Thousand People Witness a Young Woman's Faith. On March 7th, AD 203, Perpetua, Felicitas (her maiden slave), and three young men, Saturus, Saturninus, and Revocatus, were sent to die in the Colosseum. Perpetua told her story in one of the earliest manuscripts written by a Christian woman. She was about twenty-two, married, and nursing a little boy. She had been born into a wealthy family and enjoyed a good education. After finding Christ her life had changed. "I cannot be anything else, I am a Christian," she said to her anguished father.⁴⁰ It was her baptism that caused the government to begin surveillance and her arrest. She was brought before the proconsul and told to offer sacrifices to the Emperor. After refusing, she was imprisoned. "I was much afraid because I had never known such darkness." Yet her prison transformed into a palace when she was allowed to care for her son. At her trial, she declared, "I am a Christian." In anger, Hilarian, the procurator, lashed out and had her father beaten with a rod. The group was condemned to the Colosseum, "and cheerfully we went down to the dungeon. Similarly, the Apostles rejoiced in being found worthy to suffer for the Lord."⁴¹

As Saturus, Saturninus, and Revocatus entered the arena, they turned to Hilarian and declared, "You have judged us...but God will judge you." This

⁴⁰ Peter Kirby, "Acts of Perpetua and Felicity," www.earlychristianwritings.com, accessed June 29, 2018, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/perpetua.html>.

⁴¹ "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name (Ac. 5.41)."

defiance of Rome was not a bitter statement, as much as a forewarning for a judgment day.⁴² The message gives insight into early believers' anticipation for the eschatological reign of Christ.

Perpetua's final words were not a cry for justice or an outburst of anger but a plea to through faith to love one another. "Stand fast in the faith, and love one another, all of you, and be not offended at my sufferings."⁴³ Paul beckoned Timothy likewise, not to be ashamed of his witness (μαρτύριον Martyrion) but rather to join him in his suffering.⁴⁴ The animals failed to kill Perpetua, so a gladiator was sent. The novice gladiator wavered as he held the sword. She helped him and set the sword to her neck and was martyred.

Christ called his followers to be a witness (μάρτυρος martyr) to the ends of the Earth (Acts 1.8). On that day the colosseum became a great evangelistic meeting. Tens of thousands were confronted with a physical testimony of faith. "Now the city of Carthage knew that Christians would not yield to force. ... Everywhere, in the streets and marketplaces, people were talking of what they had seen and heard ... This new teaching ... took away the fear of death, and filled its followers with an inexplicable joy"⁴⁵

⁴² "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Cor. 5.10)."

⁴³ *Readings in World Christian History: Earliest Christianity to 1453*, ed. John W. Coakley and Andrea Stark (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015), 1:1.

⁴⁴ "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God (2 Tim. 1.8)."

⁴⁵ Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 17.

While Hilarian wanted to maintain Roman power, instead he introduced the Christian message into society.

iv. The Abitinian Martyrs. This story occurred after the life of Cyprian. However, it holds valuable teaching from the testimony of the church. The text reveals a deepening theological expression in the church following a hundred years of persecution.

In AD 304, the Diocletian persecution was inflicting pain on the Christian community. The Emperor called for the destruction of churches, the burning of sacred books, and forbade Christian assembly.⁴⁶ There was a price for daring to testify, “I am a Christian.” In those days, identifying with Christ would be the fast track to martyrdom.

A group of Christians in the village of Abitina were celebrating the Lord’s supper when officials arrived and arrested forty-nine. They were chained and sent them for trial in Carthage. Yet, as they walked along they sang joyful hymns.⁴⁷

The suffering of the Abitinian martyrs was a precursor to the Donatist schism (AD 311). Some of those who had suffered under the persecutions would begin to separate from the main church. “For it was not right that there should be martyrs and traitors in the church of God at the same.”⁴⁸

This new church would “be indigenous Berbers, while the Catholics tended

⁴⁶ *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, trans. Maureen A. Tilley. Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 24:xxviii.

⁴⁷ “Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart (Eph. 5.19).”

⁴⁸ *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, trans. Maureen A. Tilley. Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 24:29.

to be Roman Colonists.”⁴⁹ The group claimed that they were the true church because they would stand against the world while embracing persecution. A label of traditor (Traitor) would be applied to church leaders who had either handed over Scriptures or the names of presbyters.

Bishop Mensurius of Carthage (an accused traditor), put guards around the prison. Deprived of support, the forty-nine prisoners all died of starvation.

This paper will consider three theological statements made by the Abatinians martyrs.

Tazelita was put on the rack, stretched, and then claws dug into his body. “Blood flowed out along with his voice as he prayed...He asked for forgiveness for his enemies as his body was being torn apart.⁵⁰ ...We are not criminals. Oh God. Have mercy. To you be thanks...”⁵¹ Even under the suffering of torture, *Tazelita* forgave.

Saturninus was asked why the church insisted on gathering. “It was not possible to neglect the Lord’s supper,” he responded, “The Christian exists through the Lord’s supper.”⁵²

Under duress, *Emeritus* cried to the proconsul (*Deus, inquit, major est quam imperatores*), “God is greater than the emperors.” As he began to pray, he was interrupted, “Do you have any scriptures in your home?” He

⁴⁹ Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 379.

⁵⁰ “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you (Matt. 6.14).” “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Lk. 23.34).”

⁵¹ Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 24:32.

⁵² Ibid., 38.

replied, “I have them in my heart ⁵³.”⁵⁴ The writer contrasted Emeritus’ confession to those who handed over the Scriptures. The true believer carried the scriptures in the flesh, and so he was worthy of martyrdom. Emeritus’ confession demonstrated the Word of God was sharper than the tools being used against him.

The testimony of the three witnesses produced by suffering showed the theological approach in culture. Tazelita was quick to forgive, Saturninus showed that Christian faith existed through the Lord’s table, and Emeritus revealed God’s Word was written on the heart. After a hundred years of persecution, these martyrs showed how church doctrine had developed.

V. Tertullian and His Response

In AD 160, Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian was born in Carthage to a centurion who served the governor. He grew up in the pagan culture while studying law and philosophy. In his mid-thirties, Tertullian became a Christian and began to struggle with the treatment of the Christian community. In his first major work, *Apology*, he confronted the pagan view of Christianity after witnessing Christian persecution.⁵⁵

i. Christianity’s role in society. Tertullian began to defend the Christian community against one of the most common complaints. Why were the

⁵³ “You show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3.3).”

⁵⁴ Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 24:37.

⁵⁵ Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 46.

Christians not participating in Roman festivity and entertainment? “We have no concern with the frenzy of the races, with the lewdness of the theatre, with the cruelty of the arena,” he says, and he admits that they do not buy the customary garlands of flowers to decorate the heathen temples.”⁵⁶

Secondly, the Christian was to be a conscientious citizen. “For we are equally forbidden to wish ill, to do ill, to speak ill, to think ill of all men (*Apol. XXXVI*).⁵⁷ Believers were to pray for Caesar yet reject the Romans gods. “Though we decline to swear by the genii of the Cæsars, we swear by their safety, which is worth far more than all your genii. (*Apol XXXII*).”⁵⁸ Those who identified with Christ would not be offering to pagan gods nor be entertained by them. “But as for demons, that is, your genii, we have been in the habit of exorcising them, not of swearing by them, and thereby conferring on them divine honour (*Apol. XXXII*).”⁵⁹

ii. On Natural Disasters. Tertullian argued that Christians are not the source of natural catastrophe. “If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is famine or pestilence, straightway the cry is, “Away with the Christians to the lion! (*Apol. XL*)!”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid., 68-9.

⁵⁷ Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 44.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 43

⁵⁹ *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to a.d. 325*, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D., James Donaldson, LL. D. (Grand Rapids: T & T Clark International, 1997), 3:42.

⁶⁰ Roberts, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:47.

iii. The true adversary of Rome was not the church. Tertullian explained that Christians are not the enemies of Rome. Instead, the Christian should pray for the leaders⁶¹ and for a peaceful society (*Apol. XXXI*).⁶² The real enemy in society was the *impurity* in the paganism.⁶³ In contrast, the Christian whose bodies were a true *sanctified* sacrifice. And “not the blood of some worthless ox...With our hands thus stretched out and up to God, rend us with your iron claws, hang us up on your crosses, wrap us in flames, take our heads from us with the sword, let loose the wild beasts on us...wring from us the soul, beseeching God on the emperor’s behalf (*Apol. XXX*).”⁶⁴

Tertullian explained that a Christian in oppression will pray and bless the persecutor.⁶⁵ It is, therefore, the very mandate of the follower of Christ in the time of persecution to love their persecutor.

iv. Through Persecution, the Church Grows. The church could be bullied or forced to comply. Tertullian explained, the more the church was persecuted, the stronger it became. In his famous statement he said, “kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust; your injustice is the proof that we are innocent...The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we

⁶¹ “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way (1 Tim. 2.2).”

⁶² Roberts, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:42.

⁶³ “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Rom. 10.22).”

⁶⁴ Roberts, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:42.

⁶⁵ “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matt. 5.44).”

grow; *the blood of Christians is seed.* (*Apol. L.*).⁶⁶ As a martyr surrenders life, so the church grows.

When the Apostle John witnessed the fifth seal being opened, he saw those who had died for testifying. They cried out, “How long, Sovereign Lord will it be before you avenge our death. The Lamb tells them, not “until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.”⁶⁷ God has set a number for those who will die testifying, and then He will judge those responsible.

VI. Cyprian’s Confrontation with Rome.

Among the antique sites in Carthage is the Basilica of St. Cyprian, which overlooks the Mediterranean.⁶⁸ At one time, it was the gathering place for a persecuted church and its bishop.

In AD 202, Thacius Caecilius Cyprianus was born the year before Perpetua’s passion. Cyprian grew up in a wealthy Berber family, and received a classical education. He became a believer in AD 246 and took the name of

⁶⁶ Roberts, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:54.

⁶⁷ “*How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been (Rev. 6.10-11).”

⁶⁸ See Appendix, photo 1. Gary Witherall. “*The Basilica of Cyprian in Carthage, Tunisia.*” 2019. JPEG file.

his spiritual teacher, Caecilian.⁶⁹ In AD 248, Cyprian's life changed when the bishop of Carthage died and was asked to take his place. However, this was not well received by some church leaders. Even though he came from a pagan background, he "began with a faith as mature as that with which few perhaps finish their course."⁷⁰ Cyprian had the works of Tertullian to study. Jerome reported that Cyprian would never pass a day without reading Tertullian, saying, "Give me the master."⁷¹ However, Cyprian would sometimes take a different direction from Tertullian.

Cyprian had almost no time to build his ministry in Carthage. In AD 249, Emperor Decius Trajan demanded that all his imperial subjects offer sacrifices to the gods. Those who offered sacrifices received certificates (*libellus*). The church leaders were immediately called to account. Cyprian went into hiding along with Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, while Fabian, Bishop of Rome, was martyred. Many Christians were deprived of their property and banished from the Roman provinces at this time.⁷² In hiding, Cyprian ministered through writing. Much of his theology, focused on the church, was developed as a result of persecution. Soon after the death of bishop Fabian, an aggrieved letter accused Cyprian of running from danger; "The blessed pope Cyprian has withdrawn from

⁶⁹ This is not the same Caecilian who would later spark the Donatist controversy.

⁷⁰ Roberts, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5:267-9.

⁷¹ Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus (On Illustrious Men)*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson, vol. 3, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series* (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1892), 1, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm>.

⁷² Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 68.

public life.”⁷³ The letter expressed the role of the shepherd to stay when the wolf approached the sheep. Only the hireling runs away.⁷⁴ His opponents believed he should have faced the magistrates.⁷⁵ Cyprian, on the other hand, believed that God had called him into exile.⁷⁶ After two years, many had given into Roman persecution. Consequently, in AD 251 Cyprian held a council concerning those who had lapsed. Sharp disagreement occurred, which created a schism.

In AD 257, the emperor Valerian forbade Christians to gather. All Christians were to forfeit their houses, property and suffer banishment or execution. Cyprian was arrested and brought before the proconsul, who demanded the names of presbyters. Cyprian refused but responded, “I am a Christian and an Overseer.” In AD 258, Cyprian went to his martyrdom.⁷⁷

i. Cyprian’s argument on the Moral Collapse. Rome had offended God and instead celebrated greed, rage, gambling, and violence.⁷⁸ Shortly after his conversion Cyprian wrote about the moral collapse in the theatre, the colosseum, the courts, and the impact of the pagan gods.

⁷³ Cyprian, *On the Church. Select letters Vol. 33*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's seminary press, 2006), 48.

⁷⁴ “He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees (Rom. 10.12).”

⁷⁵ Cyprian, *On the Church. Vol. 32*, 103.

⁷⁶ “Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD (Is. 52.11).”

⁷⁷ Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 85.

⁷⁸ “For you are either swollen with pride, or you are overwhelmed by greed or raging with anger, or unrestrained in your gambling, or drunken with too much wine, or jealous with spite, or impure through sexual desire, or violent with cruelty (Cyprian of Carthage, *On the church: select treatises Vol.32:78*).”

a. The theatres portrayed the gods as adulterers enflamed in earthly passions to whom the Christian must sacrifice. "They copy their gods for whom they worship."⁷⁹

b. The colosseums were filled with the blood sport of human death. "The gladiatorial game is laid on so that the bloodshed might entertain eyes that reflect a merciless blood lust."⁸⁰ They were a celebrated procession of death. The more outrageous, the higher the price.

c. The courts held no fear for the law, "When you can buy something you do not fear it." The Roman forum had become the place to resolve a dispute. "The spear is there, and the sword and executioner is waiting, the gouging tortures claw, the stretching, horse-like rack."⁸¹

d. Pagan sacrifice involved the worship of images of crocodiles, dog-faced baboons, and snakes.⁸² The Eternal God will not put up with the sacrifice and worship of false gods. "Why do you bow and bend yourself to false gods, why do you make your enslaved body bend down before stupid statues and images of earth? God made you to stand upright."⁸³

ii. *When the Empire Blamed Christianity for a Plague.* "Corpses were flung into the streets, and left stinking in a steadily gathering cloud of flies; rats and other vermin gnawed at the bloated flesh. Infection spread... over the shattered city of Carthage."⁸⁴ Demetrian, in the year AD 252, charged the

⁷⁹ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 57.

⁸⁰ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol.32, 53.

⁸¹ Ibid., 60.

⁸² Ibid., 81.

⁸³ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 85.

⁸⁴ Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 85.

Christian community for upsetting the gods (*pax deorum*). That year had brought plague, drought, pestilence, and war.⁸⁵ Cyprian considered it foolish to try to dialogue with the Government of the time.⁸⁶ “Demetrian, I consider only with contempt your barking accusations made against God who is one and true, when your mouth is filled with sacrilege.”⁸⁷

iii. The Suffering of Rome was the Judgment of God. Cyprian saw the plagues as a righteous God provoked to anger.⁸⁸ God has *turned his head*⁸⁹ from you.⁹⁰ The Empire was being punished because it neither sought after nor feared God. “The scourges and lashes of God do not fail to be present in the disasters that are striking us down.” But Cyprian warned about a time coming when the unbeliever will enter “the eternal prison, and continuous flames, and the everlasting punishment.”⁹¹ Those in the eternal arena will face eternal punishment.⁹² A day will come when the persecuted church will watch “as spectators in that arena of those who were spectators of us in our time.”⁹³

⁸⁵ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 67.

⁸⁶ “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words (Prov. 23.9).” “Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you (Matt. 7.6).”

⁸⁷ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 68.

⁸⁸ “Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger (Jer. 25.6).”

⁸⁹ “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness (Is. 59.2-3).”

⁹⁰ Cyprian, *On the Church*, Vol. 32, 80.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁹² “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh (Is. 66.24).”

⁹³ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 93.

iv. Why did the gods need the Roman sword? Cyprian charged that the gods were being held up by the Roman enforcers. “If your gods possess a divine nature and power, let them arise to take their own vengeance.” The pagan gods should be able to defend themselves. “If, however, you are greater than those whom you worship, you ought not worship them.”⁹⁴ God hates the worship of false gods.⁹⁵

v. In suffering, believers considered ‘the Day of the Lord.’ Cyprian saw these natural disasters around him as proof that the world was coming to an end. “Now the Day of Judgement is drawing near, and his wrath is fueling the flames of catastrophes.” The disasters occurred, “not because we do not worship *your* gods, but because you do not worship God.”⁹⁶

vi. A call for Rome to turn to the Lord. Cyprian exhorted the Romans to seek God and live.⁹⁷ “Believe in him, who never deceives at all. Believe in him who predicated all these events to come! Believe in him who will give those who believe in him the reward of eternal life.”⁹⁸

VII. Cyprian’s Theology Concerning the Lapsed

i. The loss of union with Christ. Suffering caused many to fall away. After the persecution, the church began to gather. However, some had

⁹⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁹⁵ “Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction (Ex. 22.20).”

⁹⁶ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 73.

⁹⁷ “Seek the LORD and live (Amos 5.6).”

⁹⁸ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 92.

abandoned Christ. "If those who deny will not be found guilty of a crime, those who confess do not receive the reward of their moral rectitude."⁹⁹

If a man denies Christ, so Christ will deny him.¹⁰⁰ How could a church service consist of the faithful and the faithless? In AD 251 Cyprian arranged a conference at Carthage to discuss the question. The Lapsed needed to be evaluated by the church in varying degrees. Some offered sacrifices to the pagan gods gladly, while others gave in to torture. Some bribed for the certificates (*libellus*), while others had offered sacrifices (*sacrificati*). One particular offering offended Cyprian the most; Christ's propitiation was no longer valid to those who had offered incense (*thurificati*).¹⁰¹

It was one thing to flee; it was another to worship the gods. When you "Take part in the act of sacrifice, you surrender your union with the body of Christ."¹⁰² Others who acquired certificates (*libellatici*) through bribes, were also guilty. A certificate is a formal declaration that one has denied Christ, it is the declaration of an intention of a Christian to reject what has been."¹⁰³

ii. Should the lapsed be re-admitted to the Eucharist? Some had offered sacrifices to the devil and yet wanted to participate in the sacrament of Christ. "Returning from the altars of the Devil they approach the Sacrament of the Lord with filthy hands and tainted with the roasting smell of the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 126.

¹⁰⁰ "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven (Matt. 10.32-33)."

¹⁰¹ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 21.

¹⁰² Ibid., 19.

¹⁰³ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 133.

sacrifice.”¹⁰⁴ Cyprian turned to the Levitical laws concerning those who had offered sacrifices.¹⁰⁵ To approach the altar, a man must be clean. The Bishop pointed to Paul, who stopped those who offered sacrifices to the gods to come to the Lord’s table.¹⁰⁶

Aside from Cyprian’s teaching, there were three main views on restoring the fallen. Felicissimus (Rome) wanted no penance involved for a complete restoration. Cornelius (Roman Bishop) believed there should be relatively easy readmission, and Novation thought there should be no readmission for the lapsed.¹⁰⁷

iii. Cyprian’s plan on restoring the lapsed: A call for penance. Suffering then not only defined theology in the Ante-Nicene church but also purified the church. The lapsed had lost union with God. How could a local church regain trust with those who abandoned their faith under persecution?¹⁰⁸

Cyprian began to forge a path of reconciliation.¹⁰⁹ As Cyprian used the word repentance, the Latin translation was *paenitentia* (penance).¹¹⁰ The crime of offering to demons required more than words. The lapsed are to plead with

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 119.

¹⁰⁵ “All who are clean may eat flesh, but the person who eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of the LORD’s peace offerings while an uncleanness is on him, that person shall be cut off from his people (Lev. 7.19-20).”

¹⁰⁶ “No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons (1 Cor. 10.20).” “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor. 11.27).”

¹⁰⁷ Dr. Don Fairbairn, “Early Latin North African Christianity” (lecture, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, MA, June 4th, 2018).

¹⁰⁸ “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent (Rev. 2.5).”

¹⁰⁹ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 121.

¹¹⁰ Jerome *Vulgate* <https://vulgate.org/>.

God with their whole heart¹¹¹ by expressing penance for sin.¹¹² “If on Judgement Day the Lord will find the repentance of the sinner full ...God who is not mocked, and who examines the human heart...the Lord can correct the sentence passed by his servants.”¹¹³

iv. Opposition to the plan of restoration. Initially, Cyprian believed the lapsed would need to live their lives outside of the church communion and only at death be readmitted. Nevertheless, later he changed his position, the lapsed could be reconciled. Immediately a group of five presbyters led by Novation broke away from Cyprian. Their reason: there is no reconciliation for the lapsed; they must be cut off.¹¹⁴ Novation’s response was to begin (what he considered) a legitimate schism in the church; and became a rival bishop.¹¹⁵ Cyprian accused schismatic group of conspiracy (*cuniuratio*); treachery (*perfidia*); acting as a faction (*factio*) and engaged in plots (*insidiae*).¹¹⁶ In a council in Rome in AD 253, Novation was condemned and excommunicated. The group of leaders now newly expelled were considered false prophets.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments (Joel 2-12-13).”

¹¹² Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 135.

¹¹³ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 130.

¹¹⁴ “the fallen were to remain in a state of repentance, desirous of the Eucharist but cut off from actually receiving it. If they wished to wash away the sin of apostasy, they could do so with their own blood whilst the persecution still raged (Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 22).”

¹¹⁵ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 22-3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 105.

¹¹⁷ “Do not listen to what those prophets are saying to you. They are filling you with false hopes (Jer. 23.16).”

VII. Cyprian's Theology Developed Through Suffering

i. The unity of the church. Cyprian believed in One Catholic church¹¹⁸ as there is one God.¹¹⁹ The offence of schism was far more serious than a lapse of faith.¹²⁰ For Cyprian, the foundation of the church was Peter the Rock.¹²¹ Cyprian saw the church as a mother with her children under attack. "We pray for the fullest reconciliation from God, first for the Mother and then for her sons."¹²² There is no life outside of the church, he thought. "Christ is destined to come to his church and will pass judgment on those whom he will find on the inside."¹²³ After Novation created a schismatic church, Cyprian's response was clear; there can be only one Bride of Christ.

ii. The Ecclesiastical leadership. As a result of the church facing schism, the issue of spiritual authority emerged. The problem had already surfaced in

¹¹⁸ "The earliest recorded use of the term "Catholic Church" occurs in the letters written about AD 115 by Ignatius, the leader of the church in Antioch. Ignatius means by this term the universal Church comprising all the Christians in the entire world, and he takes it for granted that the members of all the local churches are included in it. Cyprian, however, a century and a half later, had to face a more complex and painful situation in which the ancient association of churches, which he called "Catholic", no longer embraced all who professed to be Christian. The Catholic Church was in fact no longer catholic. By Cyprian's time, however much he might regret the fact, it had become just one of several distinct denominations, albeit still the largest of them (*This Holy Seed* 84)."

"*There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God* (Eph. 4.4-6)." *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God* (Eph. 4.4-6)."

¹¹⁹ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 32, 153.

¹²⁰ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 155.

¹²¹ "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell^[C] shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16.18)."

¹²² Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 112.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 141.

Tertullian's day. He believed clerical hierarchy did not represent primary authority in the church. The church was a community of the elect, and therefore, no significant difference existed between laity and priests.¹²⁴

"Where there is no assembly of the clergy of the church, you the layman offer the Eucharist, and baptize, you are for yourself the only priest...where there are three there is the church."¹²⁵ In contrast, Cyprian considered the role of the bishop as guardian of Salvation. In a letter written in AD 251 and prior to his return from exile, he wrote to the loyal presbyters on the "treachery of certain brothers...against my episcopal office."¹²⁶ This was a significant shift in the way the church would view laity compared to overseers. Brent suggested that to solidify his position, Cyprian adapted Roman imperial structures into ecclesiology.¹²⁷ Hence, the church began the long journey toward becoming an institution.

iii. No life outside the church. For Cyprian, the Kingdom of God is the church. "There is no salvation outside of the church."¹²⁸ There is no benefit for those who are baptized in water or blood. A man is saved by the Spirit into the Kingdom of God.¹²⁹ "Not even baptism...is of any advantage to the heretic."¹³⁰ Cyprian took this to include those who die in the name of Christ. Even if a heretic has professed Christ, "he has been slain *outside* the

¹²⁴ "and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Rev. 1.6)."

¹²⁵ Brown, *The Lord's Prayer through North African Eyes*, 199.

¹²⁶ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 109.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 61.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 211.

¹²⁹ "Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn. 3.5).'"

¹³⁰ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 210.

church.”¹³¹ Cyprian considered these to be the ones who will say, “Lord, Lord” yet will be unknown to Christ.¹³²

iv. A suffering theology in the Eucharist. Cyprian wrote these thoughts in anticipation of persecution from Emperor Valarian, an antichrist, and therefore considered preparation for the Second Coming.¹³³ The church came into existence as thirsty people in the desert, who are washed in the living waters that emerge from the pierced heart of Christ. The only way to enter the church was through baptism and the eucharist. There is a river of refreshment for the people of God. Cyprian was describing the arid state of North Africa. “Amongst the pagans, rivers would gush forth in places that had previously been waterless.”¹³⁴ These waters would gush over the people of God. “They would flow upon the chosen nation of God, which means those made sons of God through being born anew in baptism.”¹³⁵ If any man thirsts,¹³⁶ he should come to drink the living water and receive the Holy Spirit.¹³⁷

The believer then is invited to share in the broken body of Christ.

Melchizedek was a priestly prefiguring and image of Christ offering bread

¹³¹ Ibid., 210.

¹³² “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matt. 7.21).”

¹³³ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 171.

¹³⁴ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 177.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 177.

¹³⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Matt. 5.6).

¹³⁷ “Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those (cont.) who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (Jn. 7.37-8)

and wine.¹³⁸ Melchizedek is the forever high priest.¹³⁹ As the church participates in Christ's blood, so it is united with him. "He made wine out of water, which is a reference to the marriage of Christ and the church."¹⁴⁰ As the water and wine are mixed, so the people are united with Christ.

In the passage, Wisdom slaughtered her beasts, mixed her wine and set a table.¹⁴¹ She sent out her young women to invite those who lack wisdom to share at her table. Wisdom called to the simple to eat the bread and mixed wine she prepared at her table. The chalice is intoxicating and "restores hearts back to a spiritual wisdom."¹⁴² "She proclaims in advance, in the voice of prophecy, the chalice of the Lord mixed with water and with wine...to show clearly the events of the Lord's passion."¹⁴³

Cyprian built a theology on two passages describing the one whose garments are drenched in the blood of the grape. "I have assessed the meaning of the "wine vat,"¹⁴⁴ and "treading down"¹⁴⁵ and "pressing down."¹⁴⁶ He explained that the blood of the grapes was nothing less than

¹³⁸ "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth (Gen. 14.18-19)."

¹³⁹ "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 109.4)."

¹⁴⁰ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 181.

¹⁴¹ "Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed (Prov. 9.1-5)."

¹⁴² Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 180.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 176-7.

¹⁴⁴ "...he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes (Gen. 49.11)."

¹⁴⁵ "Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress (Is. 63.2)?"

¹⁴⁶ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 176-7.

the Chalice of the Lord. It was first drunk by Christ, then administered to those who believe. There is no wine without the grapes being trodden down. The church would not be able to drink the cup without first Christ having been crushed.

v. The wounds of the church: Aurelius and Celerinus. Aurelius, still in his youth, was exiled, tortured, then stood before the magistrate and confessed his faith. Cyprian wanted to hear the same voice that confessed under duress proclaimed in the church. So, Aurelius took the office as the church reader; “after the magistrate’s dock he should approach the pulpit.”¹⁴⁷ He marveled at how the pagans heard the confession with amazement, and now the church listening to the same voice was filled with joy. The bishop knew that to hear Aurelius proclaim the Scriptures would have built faith by producing a deeper interpretation.¹⁴⁸

Celerinus, was chained without water or food for nineteen days.¹⁴⁹ He was tortured, yet he overcame. Cyprian pointed to this as God’s judgment on the Serpent.¹⁵⁰ His tortured wounds now compare to those of Christ.

Though the Serpent struck at the church, he was trodden down by Christ

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 97. “A glorious public proclamation...with the divine words. After his sublime words that have spoken his witness to Christ, it is fitting he read the gospel of Christ from whence martyrs are made. After the magistrates dock he should approach the pulpit. The former is where the crowds of pagans gazed on him, the latter where the brothers gazed on him.”

¹⁴⁸ “for, *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 10.13).”*”

¹⁴⁹ Cyprian, *On the Church. Vol. 33*, 176-7.

33:101. “Though imprisoned, he was greater than those who imprisoned him. Though prostrate on the ground, he stood higher than those who stood upright. Though overcome, he was more resistant than those who overcame him. Though he had been sentenced from the dock, he stood higher than those who sentenced him. Although his feet were shackled in the stock, the Serpent was crushed underfoot and trodden down and overcome (Gen. 3.15; Lk. 10.19).”

¹⁵⁰ “*And I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel (Gen. 3.15).*”

who is now in the church. Those in Christ have authority to tread on the Serpent.¹⁵¹ As Thomas needed visual evidence, so “the resplendent fact of his wounds confirms his victory, and the record of those scars preserves in our memory.”¹⁵² The one who was scarred for Christ befits an image of promise.

Cyprian described the wounds of Aurelius as glorious. They were gained through obedience. Likewise, Celerinus participated in Christ’s crushing of the serpent. His wounds became proof for the church, as the marks on Christ were for Thomas. Thomas who found peace through the physical wounds of Christ.¹⁵³ The soteriological work of Christ is both physical and spiritual, redeeming the soul and the body. The witness (martyr) bears the marks of Christ on his body.¹⁵⁴

v. Could forgiveness be found through the Martyrs. In a time when martyrs were highly venerated, Cyprian turned to Scripture to build his theological view of martyrdom. As Christianity continued to experience appalling persecution, “the graves of the martyrs became the favorite meeting places of the Christian community. The churches drew strength from the inspiring example of its great heroes.”¹⁵⁵ Friends and well-wishers besieged the prisons to meet the martyrs or confessors. It was a common understanding

¹⁵¹ “Look, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and on the full force of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you (Lk. 10.19).”

¹⁵² Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 101.

¹⁵³ “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed (Is. 53.5).”

¹⁵⁴ “From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus (Gal. 6.17).”

¹⁵⁵ Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 78.

that forgiveness could be found through the martyrs. For example, the martyr Paulus said, “Lucianus, I tell you before Christ that if anyone will petition you for reconciliation after I am called to heaven, grant it in my name.”¹⁵⁶ As a result, a debate grew; could a person ask the martyrs to provide absolution? Cyprian spoke against this emotional tide of thought. Even the martyrs needed to conform. Only the ecclesiastic hierarchy could grant absolution. Yet Lucianus wrote to Cyprian stating the believers should seek peace with the martyrs and not, as Cyprian would have it, that martyrs must make peace with the Bishop.¹⁵⁷ Cyprian responded, using Scripture.¹⁵⁸ “Martyrs do not make the gospel, but that martyrs are made through the gospel.”

Forgiveness is granted only through God. “The Lord said that the nations are washed in the baptism in the name of the Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in baptism past sins are forgiven.”¹⁵⁹ Cyprian protected the church from wandering into a terrible heresy. It is only through Christ that a man may find forgiveness. However, he also missed the scripture that calls on believers to confess to one another,¹⁶⁰ and directly to God.¹⁶¹ Instead, Cyprian interpreted Scripture to mean that the forgiveness of sin was offered through the bishop. In an anxiety for forgiveness and eternal

¹⁵⁶ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 78.

¹⁵⁷ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 81.

¹⁵⁸ “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28.19).”

¹⁵⁹ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 88.

¹⁶⁰ “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (Jm. 5.16).”

¹⁶¹ “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me (Ps. 51.10).”

life, letters began to reach Cyprian. For example, Celerinus appealed in a letter for his sisters, one of whom paid bribes, stating “You who can grant forgiveness to all.”¹⁶² Now the church held the key to forgiveness and a power to direct the presbyter toward penance.

vi. The flowers of the Martyrs. Due to the intense oppression, the Ante-Nicene church thought they were in the end times. “You should know that we are found in the Great Tribulation.”¹⁶³ Brent explains that these persecutions were seen as an apocalyptic event where the Antichrist would come to destroy the saints. Cyprian, as the shepherd, described being overcome by a sudden burst of weeping; sobbing that would stop a person from articulating words.¹⁶⁴ He described the congregations impacted by death as “Those who wear the flowers of martyrdom.”¹⁶⁵

The church sowed with lives and watered the land with tears. Through suffering, the church grew. In AD 256, representatives from over fifty churches in Proconsular Africa and twenty churches in Numidia gathered for a council. Fifty years later, reports testify that Christians formed a majority in the province of Africa with the exception of Cape Bon. Christian communities were also developing in Morocco, and along the Libyan coast. At this time, many Amaziah turned to Christ.¹⁶⁶

IX. Theological Interpretation from the Contemporary Church in Algeria

¹⁶² Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 75.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁶⁴ Cyprian, *On the church*. Vol. 32, 105

¹⁶⁵ Cyprian, *On the Church*. Vol. 33, 74.

¹⁶⁶ Daniel, *This Holy Seed*, 31.

The paper now pivots into the contemporary era, passing over an enormous history. Many argue that the North African church was demolished out under the Arab invasion (AD 698). However, the church did not die. The seed of the early church was buried, sown in tears, and is producing a harvest for the present.

In 1830, Algeria conceded to French colonialism; Tunisia followed in 1881. North Africa was again under European rule. Out of fear about Islamic hostility, missionary work was forbidden by the French officials.¹⁶⁷ However, the newly appointed Catholic Archbishop Lavigerie challenged the authorities. "He was the servant of a Master who couldn't be confined to a tomb and wanted to bring Christianity back to Algeria as glorious as in the first centuries!"¹⁶⁸ The government relented and the doors opened for missionary activity.

i. Too hard for God? Throughout the 20th century there were many Christian workers who ministered in North Africa. In 1900, Henry and Mary Lamb arrived from the Britain to work among the Kabyle people. The Lambs served there for forty years and saw one person come to faith. One year while Henry was preaching in England, Charles Marsh received the call to the Kabyle people. In 1927, Marsh moved to Algeria and soon afterwards married Henry's daughter Pearl.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Jean L. Blanc and Youssef Yacob, *Algerian Church Revival* (Alicante: Servicios editoriales LOGOS, 2020), 56-9.

¹⁶⁸ Blanc, *Algerian Church Revival*, 60.

¹⁶⁹ Frank Houghton, "Daisy Marsh 1929-2016," www.crescentlibrary.info, accessed April 24, 2021, <https://www.crescentlibrary.info/pdfs/Biographies/Daisy%20Marsh.pdf>.

Charles and Pearl's story is moving. They invested much of their life ministering in over 500 Kabyle villages. When they arrived, only twenty-five villages had roads; the rest were reached by foot or donkey.¹⁷⁰ Suffering shaped their story as many of those they had led to Christ were killed. In 1970, Marsh, now a frail man, acknowledged: "If I had witnessed as faithfully as I ought to have witnessed, I believe that today I would not be alive to speak to you."¹⁷¹

a. Witnessing in the face of death. Once, Marsh was sleeping by a road when men attacked him. At knifepoint they demanded he say the Islamic confession. But he replied, "You must know that I am a Christian, and that for me to repeat your creed would be to deny my Lord. In any case, God looks at the heart."¹⁷² However, they let him go after realizing they could not convert him.

On November 1st, 1954 the struggle for Algerian independence began. Europeans were being ambushed in the mountains, and many were mutilated by removal of ears or noses. "Plunder, rape, arson and murder were the order of the day."¹⁷³ The colonial government fought back. By the end of the year, over 100,000 security foreign forces were in the country.

Marsh continued to minister even after being warned about the insurgents. In one village, while teaching from Galatians, he paused on the

¹⁷⁰ C. R. Marsh, *Too Hard for God* (Bath: Echoes of Service, 1970), 18.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Intro.

¹⁷² Marsh, *Too Hard for God*, 36.

¹⁷³ Marsh, *Too Hard for God*, 146.

issue of murder.¹⁷⁴ He looked up at the men and asked, “Is it possible that there are murderers in this village?” The response was shocking, “Nearly every man in the village has taken life.”¹⁷⁵ Later, they heard that for many weeks the men in the village reflected on his teaching.

b. When the sower becomes the seed. Marsh reasoned that the season for sowing was limited. The farmer cannot sow until the rains have prepared the ground, and then he must complete his work before the snow falls. Marsh recognized the seed which he scattered had cost him everything. It was a costly seed.¹⁷⁶ If the seed is sown correctly, it will produce a great harvest. The sower must obey the call of God, and like a grain of wheat that falls “under the sod, swelling, suffering, bursting, dying, yet bringing new life.”¹⁷⁷ Now Christ had called Marsh to do likewise. As the Lord called His disciples, they become grains of wheat, to die to self that their lives might be fruitful.¹⁷⁸ Even though the work was costly, Marsh believed, “He is Worthy of our sacrificial service, our loyal devotion, our utmost love.”¹⁷⁹

c. Willing to die for the unreached. As the messenger prepares the message, so God prepares the messenger. In his eighties, Marsh sat with a group of people preparing to minister to Muslims. He cautioned: “You have no right to even begin to speak to a Muslim about Christ unless you have yourself

¹⁷⁴ “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, ... murders... (Gal. 5.19-21 KGV).”

¹⁷⁵ Marsh, *Too Hard for God*, 141.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 187.

¹⁷⁷ Marsh, *Too Hard for God*, 111.

¹⁷⁸ “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also (Jn. 12.26).”

¹⁷⁹ Marsh, *Too Hard for God*, 111.

settled in your heart that you are prepared to die for the sake of Christ... since your proclamation to a Muslim may result in that person's martyrdom. Only the one who is willing to die for Christ has the right to ask someone else to die for him too."¹⁸⁰

ii. A time of rebirth and opposition in the church of Algeria.

a. A revival among the Kabyle. In the late 1960s and 1970s churches began to emerge from missionary efforts. This led to a significant revival that took place among the Kabyle in the 1980s. As the Algerian government became aware of people turning to Christ, the church experienced waves of persecution. Even though the church grew in a time of persecution they still saw hundreds of thousands who turned to Christ.¹⁸¹ Currently, Algeria has the third largest group of believers in any Arab nation.¹⁸² Approximately fifty churches and many home groups are affiliated with the Algerian Alliance of churches (EPA) which is comprised entirely of believers from a Muslim background. However, the government of Algeria has tried to eradicate Christianity. For example, in 2006, it passed four laws against the church. Firstly, Christians were not allowed to meet in buildings not designated for worship services (96% of churches met in homes); Secondly, they were not permitted to store Christian literature in homes or transport it with vehicles; Thirdly, Christians were not permitted to witness or tell friends

¹⁸⁰ Don Little, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Ministries* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 282.

¹⁸¹ Rev. Youssef Yacob, *As Fragile as an Egg?* (Alicante: Servicios editoriales LOGOS, 2013), 16.

¹⁸² Blanc, *Algerian Church Revival*, 20.

about Jesus; Lastly, a law was passed against any Christian who caused a Muslim's faith to be "shaken."¹⁸³ The penalty would be five years in prison and a \$14,000 fine for church leaders; three years in prison, and a \$7000 fine for church members. Twenty-six churches received orders to close. "We had many cases where police arrested Christians ...were interrogated and brought before a judge."¹⁸⁴

In 2019 the twelve-hundred-member Full Gospel Church of Tizi-Ousou was closed and the doors sealed by force. Three hundred came out to protest, and police responded with violence using batons. Chalah, along with others, was beaten.¹⁸⁵

Ps. Yacob (vice president of EPA) has sent several videos of a church service with soldiers walking in to close the meeting down. The believers were dragged out or arrested and the doors sealed by government officials. This scene has repeated itself in fourteen other churches.

b. Two examples of Algerians coming to Christ. Hamid was afraid of going to hell and did not want to be part of Islam. He was camping in the Kabyle mountains when he heard believers singing. "It was the first time I'd heard young people from our village singing. I was surprised. The words of praise touched me."¹⁸⁶ Later he had a deep sense that he should ask God for forgiveness when he recalled all the bad things he had done in life. He

¹⁸³ Yacob, *As Fragile as an Egg?* 106.

¹⁸⁴ Yacob, *As Fragile as an Egg?* 106.

¹⁸⁵ Jayson Kasper, "Who Will Save Algeria's Closed Churches: The Un, Us, or Hirak?" *Christianity Today*, February 22, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/february/algeria-christians-closed-churches-united-nations-epa-hirak.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Blanc, *Algerian Church Revival*, 23.

heard God's voice and gave his life to Christ. "I went home with my faith strengthened."

Sometime later Hamid's three brothers and four sisters wanted to know about his faith. His mother had stomach problems and could not eat. "God spoke to me and said, 'you're a Christian, and you're sitting there about to eat, while your mother hasn't eaten anything for three days! ... Go and pray for her and give her yogurt'"¹⁸⁷ She ate the yogurt and later that evening gave her life to Christ.

At one time, Ahmed was part of an extremist group sent into the Algerian mountains to train as a fighter. However, he became disillusioned and left. He started to read the Bible. In a dream, he heard Jesus speak to him, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matt. 11.28)." He visited his Christian brother to find an explanation. The brother explained the verse and he came to the Lord.

Ps. Jacob wrote about those who have been coming to Christ. "No one but the Holy Spirit can bring about such revelation in someone's heart and give him strength for daily life and witness."¹⁸⁸

c. The impact of Human Rights organizations. In an all-too-familiar issue in the Middle East, Christians are asking if they have a right to exist. One option the contemporary church uses is the ability to appeal to international leaders. In 2011, while visiting Algeria, Angela Merkle asked, "I heard you

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹⁸⁸ Blanc, *Algerian Church Revival*, 28.

persecute Christians here; why?”¹⁸⁹ The government quickly responded by renewing the EPA license.

An open letter to the government and signed by the UN Human Rights Council asked why they had closed thirteen churches, noting an additional forty-nine other Protestant places of worship were closed in recent years.¹⁹⁰

d. Backsliding among the Christians. Ps. Yacob, like Cyprian, wrote about how to deal with backsliders, but his message was very different. The reasons for backsliding vary, but he emphasized a lack of teaching or pastoral care. “When they withdraw we must continue reaching out – loving them, caring for them, visiting them, praying for them”¹⁹¹ He adds that even though heavy persecution exists, “those who have been touched by the Holy Spirit, even though they go away for a while, will eventually come back. It is God who saves and God who keeps.”¹⁹²

e. Opportunity to testify before family, friends, and authorities. Just as in the days of the Ante-Nicene period, the courts are significant places to witness.¹⁹³ The believers are often detained and required to give their testimony to officials. “When Muslims become Christians, they will be asked many times by their family members, relatives, friends and sometimes authorities, how they came to faith.”¹⁹⁴ Ps. Yacob explained how it is

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹⁰ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=25707>

¹⁹¹ Yacob, *As Fragile as an Egg?* 90.

¹⁹² Yacob, *As Fragile as an Egg?* 91.

¹⁹³ “And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say (Lk. 12.11).”

¹⁹⁴ Yacob, *As Fragile as an Egg?* 55.

essential to teach young believers how to share their faith. In one detention, he was astonished when one policeman said, "There is no one like Jesus." Another time he wrote, "I was at the police station, a police officer said, "I want to tell you one thing: you know, your faith is true." Another policeman explained what he had observed: "When you (the Christians) do something good, you never tell others what you have done."¹⁹⁵ The Christians won favor and blessing from the Muslim community.¹⁹⁶ For Ps. Yacob these arrests are tremendous opportunities; it is a priority to teach believers how to give their testimony.¹⁹⁷

iii. Contemporary theological expression in the Algerian church.

a. Developing leaders as the key to church expansion under persecution.

Currently around 70% of Algerian believers are not gathering together regularly. Security, political instability, finance, and religious community pressure all play a role in keeping the church divided. How does the church grow in this situation? Ps. Yacob emphasizes the development of church leaders. The Ante-Nicene church leaders, such as Tertullian and Cyprian came out of paganism. In the same way the contemporary church is facing a similar issue. How should leaders shepherd in this climate? A Biblical perspective on ministry is vital for Muslim background believers. Four of

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 56.

¹⁹⁶ "Praising God and having favor with all the people (Ac. 2.47)."

¹⁹⁷ Yacob, *As Fragile as an Egg?* 56.

the key areas related to how pastors needs to shepherd,¹⁹⁸ good stewardship,¹⁹⁹ how to make right decisions²⁰⁰ and church discipline²⁰¹.²⁰²

b. A ministry of tears. Sometimes persecution is overwhelming.²⁰³ In a chapter called “The Power of Tears,” Ps. Yacob wrote that “often tears can express something that we cannot express with words. Sometimes we are so limited, and we can’t communicate our hearts... Tears are not a weakness. In God’s hands, they are of great strength.”²⁰⁴ In the same way, Jesus offered up prayer with fervent cries and tears to his Father.²⁰⁵ It is so similar to Cyprian, who offered tears as a superior language of the soul. Ps. Yacob described the tears as something like the gospel. A man at a camp once was causing problems. As Ps. Yacob tried to reason with the man, but he began to weep. This touched the man deeply, who with tears, asked for forgiveness.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁸ “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood (Ac. 20.28),” “Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach (1 Tim. 3.2).”

¹⁹⁹ “Desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions (1 Tim. 1.7).”

²⁰⁰ “The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter (Ac. 15.6).”

²⁰¹ “But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land (Ac. 5.3)?” “This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith (Tit. 1.13).”

²⁰² Rev. Youssef Yacob, *Competency Profiles: the Key to Leadership Development for Muslim Background Believers* (Alicante: Servicios editoriales LOGOS, 2017), 19.

²⁰³ “Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people (Jer. 9.1)!”

²⁰⁴ Yacob, *As Fragile as an Egg?* 102.

²⁰⁵ “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears (Heb. 5.7).”

²⁰⁶ Yacob, *As Fragile as an Egg?* 102.

c. God is calling Algerians. Many people from the Middle East and North Africa have fled to the West. There are millions of Algerians in Europe and particularly in France. For example, Mustapha moved to Europe, found Christ through a group of Christians, and returned to Algeria to record the “Jesus” film in the Kabyle language. Ps. Jacob explained, “I am convinced that many believers from Muslim background are chosen by God. It is God who calls and chooses those he wants to return to Algeria.”²⁰⁷ Importantly here, Ps. Yacob explained that true discipleship is not man-made, but takes place through the leading of God’s Spirit.

d. Theological truth to build the church. The contemporary church is aware that early churches did not have access to the scriptures in local languages. Today the church has developed a booklet called “spiritual milk” to help believers mature. The booklet, written in the local languages, covers theological issues such as faith, repentance, the Holy Spirit, baptism, communion, resurrection, and the Trinity. Examples from the teaching on Christ include,²⁰⁸ the pre-existent Christ,²⁰⁹ the names of Christ such as Yeshua,²¹⁰ and the Word made flesh^{211, 212}.

²⁰⁷ Blanc, *Algerian Church Revival*, 101.

²⁰⁸ “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God (1 Jn. 4.2-3).”

²⁰⁹ “*before Abraham was, I am* (Jn. 8.58).” “*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together* (Col. 1.17).”

²¹⁰ “*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins* (Matt. 1.21).”

²¹¹ “*...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...* (Jn. 1.14).” “*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life* (1Jn. 1.1).”

²¹² Blanc, *Algerian Church Revival*, 120.

X. Biblical Theology on Suffering.

i. Biblical teaching on suffering as the church testifies. To redeem His creation, the Lamb suffered from the foundation of the world.²¹³ And God gave Jesus the grace needed to save humanity before the ages.²¹⁴ Christ calls people to himself through discipleship,²¹⁵ to be a holy people.²¹⁶ The role of the disciples is to be a witness in every society throughout the world. As the Father sent the Son, so the Son sends his disciples.²¹⁷ Hence, those in Christ suffer for the gospel by the power of God.²¹⁸ Through the Spirit the disciples are witnesses to the ends of the earth.²¹⁹ The Spirit will guide the disciple through the authority of God.²²⁰ But they will despise the disciples because they first hated Christ.²²¹ The disciple who lives a godly life will be persecuted.²²² The disciple will be persecuted due to the name of Christ.²²³ The disciple will be arrested and brought before kings and authorities.

²¹³ *"the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world (NIV. Rev. 13.8)."*

²¹⁴ *"because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began (1 Tim. 2.9)."*

²¹⁵ *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Matt. 16.24)."*

²¹⁶ *"God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling (2 Tim. 1.9)."*

²¹⁷ *"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you (Jn. 20.21)."*

²¹⁸ *"Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God (2 Tim. 1.8)."*

²¹⁹ *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Ac. 1.8)."*

²²⁰ *"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come (Jn 16.13)."*

²²¹ *"But all these things they will do to you on account of my name (Jn. 15.21)."*

²²² *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3.12)."*

²²³ *"They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake (Lk. 21.12)."*

There, the disciple will bear witness (μαρτύριον *marturion*).²²⁴ In that moment the Spirit will give the disciple a mouth of wisdom.²²⁵ In the trial it is the Spirit that will speak.²²⁶ The gospel will become manifest in power, through the Spirit revealing full conviction.²²⁷ Those who suffer with him, will be glorified with him.²²⁸

ii. Word Study of Suffering in Pauline theology. The gospel in Paul's life was conveyed through suffering. Throughout his life, Paul the disciple focused the suffering and cross of Christ.²²⁹ The journey toward the cross leads the disciple to suffer. The apostle articulated over sixty times on the subject of suffering (*pathēma*, *paschō*), and affliction (*thlipsis*, *thlibo*) interchangeably, together with weakness (*astheneia*).²³⁰ All three are used to describe the suffering and death of Christ. An example of this is found in 2 Timothy 1. Paul calls Timothy not to be ashamed of his testimony (μαρτύριον *witness*²³¹/ latin: *testimonium*²³²) in prison but invites him to share suffering (Greek: *synkakopathēson*: συνκακοπάθησον/ Latin: *collabora Evangelio ...patior*)

²²⁴ "This will be your opportunity to bear witness (Lk. 21.13)."

²²⁵ "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict (Jn. 21.15)."

²²⁶ "when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, ... for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit (Mk. 13.10)."

²²⁷ "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (1 Thess. 1.5)."

²²⁸ "Provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Rom. 8.17)."

²²⁹ "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phl. 2.8)."

²³⁰ *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 919.

²³¹ Apostolic Bible Polyglot Interlinear, "https://biblehub.com/interlinear, accessed April 18, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/interlinear>.

²³² The Latin Vulgate, "" <http://www.sacredbible.org/>, accessed April 18, 2021, <http://www.sacredbible.org/>.

(v.8²³³). This suffering (Latin: *pati*) was God's call (v11-12²³⁴) that began at the point of spiritual conversion.²³⁵

Some other Pauline examples of suffering include *knowing Christ through sufferings* (Greek: *pathēmatōn*: παθημάτων/ Latin: *passionum*),²³⁶ *suffering with Christ* for the church (*pathēmasin*: παθήμασιν/ *passionibus*),²³⁷ God's comfort in *tribulation* (*thlipsei*: θλίψει)²³⁸, the *suffering of Christ* (*pathēmata*: παθήματα)²³⁹ and the *affliction of Christ* (Constricted *thlibometha*: θλιβόμεθα).²⁴⁰

Paul's writings do not call believers to suffer, but rather suffering comes through identifying with Christ²⁴¹.²⁴² Those who live a Christ-like life will fellowship in his suffering.²⁴³

This study suggests the Lord invites the believer into a relationship with the suffering Christ. Paul spoke "as one of those who demonstrated their faith by their endurance in the midst of adversity."²⁴⁴ As disciples witness in

²³³ "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel (2 Tim. 1.8)."

²³⁴ "who saved us and called us to a holy calling, ... for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer (2 Tim. 1.9-12)."

²³⁵ "For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name (Ac. 9.16)."

²³⁶ "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death (Phl. 3.10)."

²³⁷ "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Col. 1.24)."

²³⁸ "who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Cor. 1.4)."

²³⁹ "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings (2 Cor. 1.5)."

²⁴⁰ "If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation (2 Cor. 1.6)."

²⁴¹ "and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Rom. 8.17)."

²⁴² Hawthorne, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 920.

²⁴³ "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3.12)."

²⁴⁴ Hawthorne, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 920.

community through lifestyle or proclamation, they participate in community and in the work of Christ. *To have passion is to participate.*

XI. Suggestion for Further Research and Final Reflections

This paper has shown many similarities between the contemporary and ancient church in North Africa: ministry sown in tears, new believers coming from a different religious background, the confiscation of land, buildings, and scriptures, and young believers struggling under persecution. The Ante-Nicene church provided theological direction on ethics, witness, civil disobedience, and hope for engaging with an oppressive government or a hostile community.

i. Suggestion for further studies. One area for further studies on this topic would be to examine the teaching on perseverance in light of suffering. How should the church stand in a culture that defies godly principles? Hebrews 10 provides an example of Paul imploring the church to stand firm, and not give up gathering to encourage one another. The Apostle compelled the church to persevere by remembering the promises of God.²⁴⁵ He wrote as if directly to the North African church to remember the reward for those who persevere.

²⁴⁵ “Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (Heb. 10.32-36).”

ii. *The seed supplied by God for a great harvest.* In the act of testifying, I will bear witness. On November 2, 2002, my wife, Bonnie Witherall, was murdered at a medical clinic, with three bullets to her face. We had been working with Palestinian refugees in the city of Sidon, Lebanon. Within an hour, I lay a few feet away from her body, thinking my life might also end. I sensed the Lord speak. *"Gary, a seed has been planted in your heart. It will grow from anger to hatred or from forgiveness to love. You must choose."* I knew I could not naturally find such forgiveness in me. In my tears I envisioned looking through the eyes of Christ on the cross. As the tears and blood ran from his face, he cried, "Father forgive him." I had entered into the suffering of Christ. In that place, on that day, I comprehended what it meant to forgive. Almost immediately, I forgave. A few days later, over 600 gathered in the church where I testified that through Christ, I was able to forgive the gunman. The media there could not believe it, "How could you forgive someone for murder?" The next day my decision to forgive was printed on the front pages of many newspapers in the Middle East.

On my return to the USA, I wondered if I forgave too quickly out of weakness. Eventually I began to understand. When God calls a man, he must follow the call immediately.²⁴⁶ The only decision is to obey, or to disobey, to step out in faith or ignore God's calling. Peter the disciple was called to leave his nets, but later, Christ called his to walk on water.

²⁴⁶ *"Immediately they left their nets and followed him (Matt. 4.20)."*

Without faith it is impossible to draw near to God.²⁴⁷ Without faith it is impossible to obey truth. Without faith it is impossible to forgive. The story of Tazelita showed an extraordinary grace. Even as he was brutalized, he forgave. Surely in that moment, forgiveness would be impossible without the prompting from the Holy Spirit²⁴⁸ to endure such suffering and the grace to see it through.²⁴⁹

A seed can be eaten or sown. As Marsh wrote, if the costly seed is sown, it produces a harvest. In my life, it was Christ who provided the seed.²⁵⁰

Emeritus showed how in sorrow the living Word of God is written on the heart of the disciple.²⁵¹ In the time of profound suffering, the church will endure.

iii. The suffering in the North African church. Scripture gave a breathtaking depiction of how the North African church would participate in the suffering of Christ. Simon a Libyan, carried the cross of Christ.²⁵² He was from a large community of Jewish ex-pats living across North Africa and may well have been picked out of the crowd by the Romans for his foreign appearance.

Simon was to walk with Jesus, who demonstrated true discipleship is to

²⁴⁷ "Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Heb. 11.6)."

²⁴⁸ "for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict (Lk. 21.15)."

²⁴⁹ "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." ... I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12.9-10)."

²⁵⁰ "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness (2 Cor. 9.10)."

²⁵¹ "you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3.3)."

²⁵² "As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross (Matt. 27.32)."

deny self and carry the cross of Christ. It must have been unfathomable when Simon understood Christ's passion was an act of love for all humanity. No one chooses discipleship, no one chooses the cross – Christ calls the disciple. No one should choose to suffer...suffering is the participation in the work of Christ.

iv. A meditation on the journey of carrying the disciple's cross. And Simon the North African was called to take up the cross of Christ.

Why me? I just came to look.

The whisper of Christ *"Few will be able to follow me."*

'The calling: It was not easy when the soldiers grabbed me.
The shock- I was on my way, about my own business- I was pulled out...'

"You did not choose this, but Simon, I chose you..."

'The hatred, it was awful. Lord, the road is lined with mockers. I wasn't expecting the rejection'

"It was not you whom they were rejecting..."

'The destination...Where are we going Lord?'

"Simon, you will witness the greatest gift in all human history. I will share this with you, for you to know."

Beyond the crowds, off in the distance I saw the destination.

Where is this celebration? I thought it was in Jerusalem.

"No, it's outside, on a lonely hill."

Blood on the door – Passover – blood on my face – a new and more perfect
sacrifice

"Simon, my road is narrow."

How narrow, Lord?

"Come follow me..."

It was a journey I never expected to take.

Gary Witherall 2018.

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XIII. Appendix

An abbreviated timeline in the history of North African Christians in this paper

160	Tertullian born
177-192	The persecution under Marcus Aurelius and Commodus
180	The persecution at Scillitan

195	The conversion of Tertullian
200	Cyprian born
202-204	The persecution under Severus
203	The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas:
230	The death of Tertullian
245	The conversion of Cyprian
248	Cyprian appointed Overseer in Carthage
249-251	The persecution under Decius
253-260	The persecution under Valerian
258	The martyrdom of Cyprian
261	Gallienus declaration of tolerance toward Christianity
284-304	The persecution under Diocletian
304	The Abitinian Martyrs
308	The persecution under Galerius
310	The Edict of toleration by Galerius
313	The Edict of Milan granting freedom of religion
325	The Council of Nicaea
698	The Arab invasion conquered Carthage and Rome
withdrew	
1927	Charles and Pearl Marsh began ministry among the
Kabyle	
1954	Algerian independence
1981	Revival begins to spread among the Kabyle
2006	A decree restricting Christianity
2019	Fourteen churches closed by the Algerian Government

Photographs from North Africa



The Basilica of Cyprian in Carthage, Tunisia (Gary Witherall, 2019).



The hypogeum at El Djem in Tunisia (Gary Witherall, 2019).



The Colosseum at El Djem in Tunisia (Gary Witherall, 2019).